

The Gathering and the Storm

by Sergeant Conley

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Summary: The Dark Man came, and death and destruction followed.
Stephen KingHalo crossover based on my Halo RolePlay site, first
fic.

1. The Dark Man Cometh

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 1: The Dark Man

On a distant planet called Orion 7, a man opened his eyes and saw his surroundings. The man wore a pair of faded blue jeans with a faded t-shirt, a denim jacket, and old cowboy boots with worn-down heels. His jacket contained a pin-on button on each breast. The left one was a peace sign while the right one simply said "Born to Kill" written in simulated blood. He was on a road that lead to one of the planet's cities. Like all of the cities, it was abandoned. But something told the man different. He didn't know why, but he knew the city wasn't abandoned. Not completely at least. Before he could dwell any more on the subject, thoughts entered his mind. They all entered at once, like one word, all in a chain:

CaptainTripsLloydHenreidLasVegasTrashcanManTheOldWomanTheFreeZoneJudge
FarrisDaynaJurgensNadineCrossH

>
andofGodPeteThomasDennisNaomiBenRolandDeschainofGileadCrimsonKingDarkT
owerMordredDeschain.
 With these thoughts came a name: Randall
Flagg. His name was Randall Flagg. The dark man grinned and knew (he
didn't know how, but he knew) that this was no ordinary dimension or
reality. This one contained his favorite things: war, conflict,
strife, death, and most importantly of all, new opportunities. One of
which was the group of UNSC rebels in the city ahead. Whatever the
UNSC was, he didn't know, but he would soon enough. For now, he
needed soldiers. And they would be the rebels. They would bend to his
will, one way or the other. With that thought on his mind, and a grin
on his face, the dark man walked towards the city, his boot heels
clocking on the pavement.

2. The Rebels

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 2: The Rebels

John Locklear sat at his old, worn-down desk and stared. Stared at
the wall. Stared into space. Stared at nothing in particular. He just
stared. He was in an underground base on the planet Orion 7, a base
inhabited by his small band of rebels. Small meaning roughly 136. It
was both the perfect set-up and the most likely of being found by
those UNSC dogs. Perfect because the planet was devoid of life. The
humans had left with the threat of the Covenant, and for some unknown
reason the animals all died off. Every last one of them was in the
dirt. Because of this, no one would think of looking here. It was the
most likely of being found because if the UNSC _did_ decide to look
here, they'd bring thermal imaging, and it'd be a helluva lot more
easier to find them due to nothing else to give off heat signatures.
But Locklear felt lucky. He knew the UNSC would never find them. But
something didn't feel right. Locklear had spent most of his life in
the field, and like every hardened soldier, he had a "sixth sense"
that told him when something was wrong. And that feeling was burning
brighter than the target of a MAC gun shot. For now, Locklear just
sat and stared. Sat and stared. Stared at the wall. Stared into
space. Stared at nothing in particular. He just star-

> "Ahhhhh!"

> Locklear sat straight up at that sound. The sound of a scream. He
was about to hit the alarm when he found the button to be...gone?

Where the hell...? he thought.

> "Looking for this?" asked a voice. Locklear looked straight ahead to see a man in an odd material of clothing that seemed worn in. There were...buttons?...on his jacket. He was holding the alarm button in his hand.
 "Who the hell are you?" Locklear asked sternly. The man chuckled in response.

> "My name's Randall Flagg." he said before he crushed the button, walked forward and leaned forward with his hands on the desk. "And I'm your new boss."<p>

3. The Deal

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 3: The Deal

At first Locklear stared into Flagg's eyes. They were jovial in a dark sort of way. They contained evil glee and rancid joy. They were the kind of eyes that could drive you mad after awhile. So Locklear looked to the top drawer of his desk, which contained the equalizer of the situation: a fully loaded M6D Pistol. He looked back at Flagg to prevent suspicion, but concentrated on his whole face rather than his eyes.

> "And what makes you come to this conclusion Mr. Flagg?" Locklear asked in as even a tone of voice as he could muster, given the fact he was talking to some guy who had somehow entered his officer without using the door...which was the only entranceexit. Flagg stood up and crossed his arms over his chest.

> "Well, Johnny-boy, there are a few reasons for this." replied Flagg, He then turned and started walking around the room, his attention on the various items of the office. While wondering how Flagg knew his name, Locklear silently opened the drawer and gripped the pistol, his eyes never leaving the denim clad figure pacing the office. Locklear held the pistol under the desk just as Flagg turned to him and stood before the desk.
 "One is that I can kill you without even lifting a finger. Another is I can do it before you can even consider lifting that pistol and firing it." said Flagg. Locklear's face didn't show any emotion say mild puzzlement, but his soldier's mind was working fast. If this guy really knows about the pistol, he could know a few other things. Other things that could be advantages. And if he knew these advantages, then he was a threat. And therefore, he had to be taken care of. Without another word, Locklear stood, aimed the pistol right at Flagg's face and pulled the trigger. There was a loud crack as the weapon fired, flames burst from the muzzle...and nothing happened.

> What the fuck? thought Locklear. The weapon had fired, no jams, no dud no nothing. But no bullet had been launched into Flagg's face. In fact, Flagg was laughing. Locklear fired three more times, each with the same result: muzzle flash, gunshot, no bullet. Locklear removed the magazine and gazed at the rounds. They were perfectly fine. So how could...

> "Looking for these?" Flagg asked as he held out his hand palm-up to reveal the bullets, sans cases, as if he had pulled them out of their cartridges before it fired. Now Locklear knew for a fact that this guy was a threat. He also might want to listen to this proposition.
 "Alright, Mr. Flagg. You have my attention." said Locklear. Flagg smiled and threw the bullets to the side.

> "Good. Now John, you and I have a common enemy: what you call the UNSC. I plan on raising an army, overthrowing this UNSC, and ruling all of humanity under...the banner of true freedom, just as you rebels are. The only flaw in your plan is that you're too separated and divided. There are only small bands of you, not a single force. If we combine our efforts, we can assemble the largest rebel force ever known to mankind. I'll be in charge, and you'll be my right-hand man." explained Flagg.
 "Why not the other way around? I mean, you are relatively new here, and I've been fighting the UNSC for a helluva lot longer than you have. so logically, _I_ should be in charge." replied Locklear. Flagg smiled. Then, as if a set of Brute hands had closed around his throat, Locklear couldn't breath. He was lifted off the ground, over the desk, and set before Flagg, the hold still on his windpipe.

> "Because you can't do this." Flagg stated simply. The hold disappeared and Locklear keeled over coughing madly. "So, you serve as my right hand, and together, well destroy the UNSC by the end of the year. What do you say...friend?" Flagg then extended his right hand towards Locklear. When he stopped coughing, Locklear stood and considered his options. He ultimately decided on the best one.
 "Deal." he said as he gripped Flagg's hand and shook it.

4. The Spartans

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 Part 4: The Spartans

At a firing range in a UNSC base, Colonel Sam Harwood-191 aimed his classic Smith and Wesson Model 500 .50 Magnum revolver. Sam was one of the few Spartans remaining, and was a special case: he had been given to the Marine Corps as a sign of good faith by ONI. He fired a round and scored a bulls eye on the target which was automatically

replaced by another. Another round, another bulls eye. This continued until the five-round cylinder was empty. As he placed a speed-loader of five more rounds into the cylinder, he was approached by another figure.

> "Still trying to beat my score?" asked Master Chief Petty Officer Xerxes Vatton-047.
 "Trying and succeeding." replied Sam before he finished another cylinder's worth of bulls eyes.

> "Where you at?" Xerxes asked.
 "Bullseye number one hundred and eighty five. In another six rounds, you'll be looking at the new high score holder." replied Sam. He then fired and scored five more bulls eyes. He emptied the cartridges from the cylinder and pulled out a single bullet which he held in the light. "I've been saving this bullet for awhile." said Sam as he and Xerxes admired the round.

> "Sorry to tell you Sam, but the day you get a hundred and ninety one bulls eyes in a row is the day I bend over and kiss your pale ass." said Xerxes.
 "Well prepare to pucker up, Friend, because this round ain't missin'." replied Sam as he loaded the round into the cylinder. He raised the revolver, aimed and concentrated completely on getting that bulls eye. He was so concentrated that everything else ceased to exist, including Xerxes and the mischievous grin on his face. Timing it perfectly, Xerxes let out the loudest sneeze he'd let out in awhile just as Sam fired. He was so concentrated, that he jumped in surprise...just as he pulled the trigger. There was a ting as the round struck the arm holding the target, which dropped to the floor. At first Sam only stood there in shock. Xerxes let out a low, drawn out whistle.

> "Tough luck, Sam. Looks like things just didn't go your way." Xerxes said as he walked off and then broke into a whistling tune. Sam stared at the door Xerxes exited out of for a few seconds.
 "Son of a bitch." Sam mumbled angrily as he left the room.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Andrew Greer-032 and SCPO Alexia-234 were staring intently at the cards in their hands. They had finished training with the marines of the 18th Recon Battalion and were enjoying their free-time before lights out.

> "Two nines." said a marine as he laid two cards face down in a pile of cards.
 "Three tens." said the Master Gunnery Sergeant also in the circle of six.

> "Four Jacks." said another marine.
 "Bullshit." Alexia said almost automatically.

> "Oh, Johnny-boy, I think the Spartan's calling you out." the first marine said mockingly. Johnny-boy grimaced as Alexia flipped over the cards to reveal a nine, two sevens, and a three. Alexia then handed these cards as well as the entire face down pile to Johnny-boy who groaned in despair at the new size of his hand.
 "Damn Ramirez, I think she can read our minds." said the Master Guns.

> "Wouldn't surprise me, sir. Spartans can do anything." replied Ramirez.
 Andrew and Alexia shared an amused grin at this though.

> "I'll keep that information to myself." replied Alexia as she grinned at the four Jacks in her hand. Andrew then laid his cards down.
 "Four Queens." he said.

> "Bullshit." Ramirez said desperately. Andrew turned over the cards to reveal four Queens. Ramirez groaned as these cards were handed to his already large hand. Luck, however, did step in for the unfortunate one just then.
 "Alright ladies, Colonel Shelton says lights out." said the Battalion Sergeant Major who moved through the barracks. Despite the groans of protest, everyone obediently began turning in. As the lights began snapping off, Alexia was already asleep. She dreamed of a dark man with no face and red eyes...

5. The Admiral

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 5: The Admiral

Admiral Oliver Wilkinson rubbed his forehead in an attempt to aid the aspirin in destroying his migraine. He ****hated**** random migraines. Soon, an officer walked into the room holding a newspaper.

> "Mornin' sir." said Vice Admiral Pierce.
 "Morning Frank." replied the Australian admiral.

> "Another migraine? Jesus H. Hemorrhoids, sir, that's a bitch."
 "Tell me about it. I'm the one whose skull feels like it's about to explode any nanosecond." For some reason, these migraines always came when Wilkinson wasn't on his ship the _UNSC Australia_ named after his beloved home country.

> "It's probably this station fuel they use sir." said Pierce. "If you're able to, you might wanna see this."
 "Just read it to me. Quietly." Pierce cleared his throat and found the appropriate article.

> "The United Nations Space Command can celebrate another victory. Thanks to the leadership skill of General Martin Zyrha, the long besieged planet Clira Organ can now have peace. The well decorated general was able to launch a full-scale attack on the Covenant garrison and was able to finally capture the city, despite the heavy loss of life. When asked for a comment, General Zyrha only said: 'This victory is for the UNSC, humanity, and the boys who kept the Covvie bastards pinned down long enough for me to get there.'" Oliver's fingers froze as the migraine grew even worse...if that was humanly possible. "In short, sir, you've been gypped...again. There's no mention of you, the support fleet that transferred the good General Zyrha, or your rescue mission when his shuttle pod was shot down."
 "It doesn't matter." said Oliver.

> "'It doesn't matter'? But sir, you nearly lost your life nine times to save his! And where's your credit? Up our asses and around the corner because that son of a bitch-"

> "I said it doesn't matter. Frank, you're my friend and I'm glad you're looking out for my interests, but I just don't care. Let that arrogant pissant flaunt around all he wants." said Oliver who was in the process of begging God to end either his life or the migraine. "Now just please go find out when we can get the hell out of here. That or find me some more aspirin."
 "Yes sir." Pierce said before leaving. Oliver, meanwhile, continued massaging his forehead. It was going to be a long, ****long**** day.

6. The Plan

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 6: The Plan

Randall Flagg sat at his new desk in the underground base of Orion 7. Locklear had worn it in pretty well, but that wasn't important. What was important was the plan of action.

> "It's official Johnny-boy. The Praebo Colony now serves as secondary base of operations for our grand army." said Flagg.
 "Boss, what I don't get is why don't we pack up our base and move over there. I mean, it's more advanced and efficient than ours. So why even bother staying here?" inquired Locklear from across his desk. His ****former**** desk. He had to get used to standing all over again.

> "Because Lock, it's the very same reason you set up here: the UNSC will never think of looking here. The Praebo Colony is more likely to be found, and if so, it's the one we might want them to find the most."
 "If it's found and destroyed, they'll think it was our main base and stop looking for others." Locklear said in realization.

> "Bingo was his name-o Johnny-boy. But we won't have to worry about that contingency plan. Our main concern is for the future of our operations. How's stage one coming along?"
 "Smoothly sir. More and more soldiers are arriving everyday to join our army. At this rate, we'll be ready for stage two in roughly two months."

> "That soon?" Flagg asked. He was optimistic about this, but not that optimistic.

> "Yes sir. We'll have enough men and supplies for the attack desired, now we only need an objective." said Locklear. Flagg though for a moment before replying.
 "We'll burn that bridge down when we get there. In the meantime, have our current forces continue training and preparing. In exactly two months, we'll be on high ready mode. I don't want to make a bad first impression." he said.

7. The Operatives

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 7: The Operatives

In a jungle somewhere in the galaxy, Artemis Entreri aimed his sniper rifle from his hidden position and waited. In his sights was a compound run by rebels. This one was probably the only one in this system still running operations. In the compound, several guards armed with various weaponry patrolled in varying intervals along the bases outer perimeter which was lined with electric fencing. Of Entreri's glorious career as an ONI operative (as well as a galactically renowned assassin and mercenary), this was probably his easiest mission ever. The base commander, a former admiral by the name of Gus Hayter, would soon leave his bunker, enter his personal Pelican dropship, and head to some moon for more weapons dealings. The only problem was that he wouldn't make it to his Pelican. Behind him, Petty Officer Third Class Raynor G-070 stood watch for approaching enemies with her silenced MA5K Assault Carbine. The S-III was on high-alert and paying careful attention for disturbances in her surroundings. Artemis, meanwhile, was simply waiting for the- ah, speak of the devil. At that very moment, former Admiral Gus Hayter strolled out into the wide open air en route to his dropship. He was part way there when he stopped to chat with an engineer. This was his last mistake. Holding his breath, Artemis applied the needed pressure to the trigger. He was awarded with the snap of the rifle and the kick of the stock. In his scope, Artemis watched as Hayter's skull opened up and let out a flood of brain matter. He then turned to Raynor.

> "Well, let's get the hell out of here." he said.
 "Got it Boss." Raynor replied as they left their position reveling in the wail of the alarms in the distance. They eventually came to a clearing where a Pelican awaited. Boarding it, the two operatives leaned back and relaxed for the first time since the start of this five day mission. The third passenger, a UNSC colonel simply smiled for a moment as the hatch closed.

> "Congratulations on yet another successful mission Entreri." he said. "I trust no one saw you?"
 "If they did, we didn't see them." replied Artemis. "I highly doubt that we were spotted." Soon, the three were in orbit to a small cruiser which would get them home to a nice dinner and bed.

> Another day, another headshot. Artemis thought humorously.

8. The First Prisoner

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 8: The First Prisoner

Private First Class Luke Zellner continued walking and searching with the rest of his squad, his hands relaxed on his MA5C Assault Rifle. His platoon had been stationed in a small forest roughly a mile from the base. They were one of eight forward outposts dedicated to giving an early warning to the base for an attack. Currently, Zellner and his squad were busy on patrol through the peaceful woods that had never seen war, and wouldn't for another three minutes. The marines were bored and unexpecting of an attack, and were pretty far from the outpost for patrol standards. But that didn't matter.

> "Hey Zel, how's that girl of yours?" asked Luke's best friend, Lance Corporal Joe Branigan.
 "Not mine anymore, Joe. Seems my brother's got a nicer ass than I do." replied Luke glumly.

> "Harsh." said Joe. "Cheer up pal, that broad was a bitch anyways."
 "Yeah, well, it kinda makes us even." said Luke.

> "How so?"
 "I cheated on her awhile back."

> "No kiddin'?"
 "Nope. It was when we were stationed back on Firlori, you remember that blonde nurse?"

> "Big boobs blonde nurse, or nice ass blonde nurse?"
 "Nice ass blonde nurse. One night, seven times. I felt guilty about it all the way until Erin's letter."

> "Well, at least you got some action out of-" Joe was cut off by the exploding of the squad leader's head, torn to pieces by a sniper round. Before anyone could react, automatic weapons fired from the surrounding bushes and trees, cutting down the squad. Luke screamed as a round slammed into his ankle, dropping him to the ground. Soon, everyone was on the ground either dead or wounded. The attackers, rebels as it were, came forward. One of them was John Locklear. Locklear walked amongst the survivors with his pistol drawn. After counting them, he aimed and popped off three rounds, one for each head. Minus one for the prisoner. That prisoner was Luke Zellner.<p>

9. The Second Prisoner

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>The Gathering and the Storm<p><p>

Part 9: The Second Prisoner

Private Melanie Howards was best described by the phrase "platoon slut". And she really didn't care. People have...needs. And when a 40 man platoon is literally made of 39 men, needs need to be met. Melanie's...needs were met on a regular basis, and almost everyone else in the platoon had theirs met. Except for Gunny Granger, who was too old for Melanie's taste, and Corporal Kramer, who was a little...fruity. But those two were the farthest thing from her mind as she exited the utility closet where she had officially initiated a rookie into official platoon member status. She wore her combat boots and fatigue pants, her tee-shirt in her hands, thus revealing two bare breasts. This only lasted for about three seconds as she donned said shirt and fixed her black hair to be presentable to anyone who she might meet in the hallways. The new member exited behind her and, as instructed after climax, walked away as if he didn't know her. Melanie continued on her way to the barracks, nodding politely to any other off-duty personnel she met. Upon arriving in her barracks, she laid down to rest and ignore the rough-housing of the other ODST's. She closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. When she awoke, she was in an odd prison cell of some sort. There were three steel walls and a bullet-proof Plexiglas one which held a door. Wherever she was, she severely doubted it would be enjoyable...

10. The Medic

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 10: The Medic

Lance Corporal Donovan Siefker grunted in pain as he regained consciousness. He was in a cell made of three steel walls and a Plexiglas one. Probably, but that really didn't matter since he no longer had any weapons, just his combat boots, fatigue pants, and olive drab tee-shirt. As Don sat up, he grabbed the back of his head and found a pool of dried blood where he'd been...hit? That seemed most likely, because this was too much dried blood to be from falling and hitting his head.

> "Glad to see you're up." said a voice behind him. Turning around,

Don came face-to-face with the finest piece of ass he'd ever seen in military clothing sitting in the corner of his cell. Or their cell, whichever it was. "Private Melanie Howards, 3rd Platoon, Hotel Company, 2nd Battalion, 59th Infantry Regiment part of the 237 Marines Division. You?"
"Lance Don Siefker, 405th." he replied simply. "What's a fine girl like you doing in a place like this?"
> "Normally, I'd ignore that comment, have a few drinks, make small talk, eventually go up to your room, and fuck the night away. But considering the circumstances..." she waved her hand around, indicating the cell.
"I get the point." Don said, dropping the subject. Well this was a fine predicament. He was trapped in some rebel camp, (it had to be rebel considering there were no energy shields), defenseless, and possibly waiting the wall and the firing squad. _Well, at least I'll have a good view to help pass the time._ Don thought as he watched Melanie lay down in such a way that her shirt was pulled up enough to reveal her flat, slightly pale, and very sexy stomach. If he knew what role he was to play in the coming events, however, getting lucky wouldn't have been so prominent in his mind. Still there, but not as prominent.

11. The Massacre

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>The Gathering and the Storm
Part 11: The Massacre

Senior Chief Andrew Greer-032 exited the Pelican with Alexia and the squad of marines they'd been riding with. The 18th Recon Battalion was assembling its forces in a field on the planet of Orion 7, the supposed location of Target Romeo Foxtrot.

_Three days earlier

> "Alright marines, listen up." said Lieutenant Colonel Shelton. "Lately, several UNSC personnel have been taken prisoner by rebel forces for reasons unknown. Until these attacks, the rebels had been quiet for the past two months. ONI reports that, during this time, rebel forces had been gathering at unknown rally-points and moving to another unknown area. ONI sent a double agent into the rebel forces in an attempt to figure out what the hell's going on. The agent sent back information of a new rebel army assembling on the abandoned planet of Orion 7. Apparently, somebody's trying to assemble a grand army to take down the United Nations Space Command. There were varying reports on the name of this individual: Russell Faraday, Robert Forrester, Robert Fowler, and Randy Flagg. This man has been designated Target Romeo Foxtrot, and he's your primary objective.

You're to capture him alive, and bring him here for questioning. I can't make it any simpler, so let's move out."

Andrew was helping the marines unload some equipment from an Albatross when the Battalion Sergeant Major called for a patrol. All of the patrols were to include one of the Spartans, who'd take turns.

> "I'll take the first one, you just go on pack-mulling." Alexia said to Andrew.
 "Don't step on any land mines. I hear they're not exactly good for your health." Andrew replied as he dropped another supply crate. Grinning under her helmet, Alexia moved out with the squad, as well a platoon combat engineer who had volunteered to come along. Walking into the surrounding forest, Alexia took one last look at the marines before they were out of sight. It was the last time she would ever see any of those men.

Andrew soon dropped the last crate and let out a sigh of relief. As he unshouldered his Battle Rifle, one of the marines pointed to the sky.

> "Holy shit dude, look!" he said to another. Andrew followed the two marines' gaze to see a crow fly overhead.
 "What? It's just a crow." said marine number 2.

> "Yeah, but crows have been extinct on the planet since everyone left. Shit, all of the animals have been extinct since everyone left." Andrew suddenly felt uneasy watching the crow. It soon landed on the ground not far from the perimeter guards who never even gave it a second glance. There was something odd about the crow: it had red eyes. Before he could think about it any more, an extremely loud boom of thunder roared to the north. Every last marine in the camp turned to that direction. What worried everyone was the fact that the sky was perfectly clear. Not a single cloud in the sky. Then, there was a white flash. Not lightning, but some white flash that appeared from seemingly no source. There was a cry of surprise that gained everyone's attention. The perimeter guards, and soon everyone in the battalion, were aiming their weapons at a man in blue clothing standing where the crow had been. The Battalion Master Gunnery Sergeant stepped forward, his shotgun at the ready. "Who the hell are you?" he asked. The figure smiled revealing perfect white teeth. There was something unsettling about that smile.

> "I'm Randall Flagg. And I just thought you'd all like to see me before you died." Before anyone could say or do anything, the Master Guns's throat opened as if it were hinged, and spewed blood everywhere. The marines were too shocked to do anything. But not Andrew. He squeezed on the trigger of his rifle...and nothing happened. In fact, he hadn't even squeezed. He couldn't move at all.<p>

Flagg smiled as his imagination became reality. The marines began opening up in several vital areas, spraying blood in steady streams all over each other and the grass. One screamed in agony as he intestines were ripped out of his stomach by an unseen hand, one end still in his body. He was then lifted and spun around by his innards before being slammed into a tree, his spine snapping like a twig. Another ripped out his own eyes, tongue, and ears before he shot himself in the throat with his own sidearm. Screams of pain, agony, and death filled Flagg's ears like music. Soon, all of the marines were dead.

Andrew was finally able to move. He looked around to see nothing but a sea of red and purple. He'd seen some pretty sick things on the

battlefield, but this topped them all. Andrew turned to see Flagg still standing there, not a drop of blood on him. Without even thinking, Andrew raised his rifle, aimed for Flagg's skull, and pulled the trigger. The three-round burst fired, soared through the air, and stopped mere centimeters from its target's face. Flagg simply glanced at the bullets before tapping each of the and letting gravity drag them to the ground.

> "That's not gonna help at all, Andy-boy." Flagg said. Andrew then felt a sharp pain in his skull, and he slipped into the blackness of unconsciousness.<p>

12. The Message

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 12: The Message

Alexia was on point for the patrol. They'd been out of camp for roughly nine minutes.

> "So what do you guys think that thunder was all about?" asked a rifleman, none other than Johnny-boy Ramirez of the infamous card skills (or lack thereof).
 "What do you mean?" asked the combat engineer who'd volunteered to come along.

> "Well, when it thunders, it's usually because of a storm. There hasn't been a cloud in the sky since we got here." explained Ramirez.
 "Maybe it was some weather anomaly." said another rifleman, his voice heavy with a Texas accent.

> "Maybe God's pissed at the Democrats again." said one of the fire team leaders jokingly.
 "The who?" asked Pvt. Texas.

> "The Democrats were a political party that existed from the formation of the United States government to about 2534." Alexia said, speaking up for the first time all patrol.
 "Well whoever the hell they are, they're not on patrol, so shut your yappin' and get back to patrollin'." said the squad leader. They continued patrolling when a crow landed on a tree stump that Alexia was passing. Glancing at it, she noticed it had red eyes. Remembering her dreams of the previous week, she couldn't help but shudder. As the whole squad passed the crow completely, one of the medics, his voice thick with a Russian accent asked: "Is it just me, or was that crow the first sign of habitual life we've seen all day?" This caused the whole squad to stop in its tracks. There was suddenly a flash, as if there vision had gone completely white for a millisecond. Turning back to the crow, they only found a man in odd clothing sitting on the stump.

> "Hi folks!" the man said cheerfully as he stood and smiled,

revealing perfect white teeth. The squad whipped its weapons up and aimed all for the figure's forehead.
 "Who the hell are you?" asked the squad leader. The stranger's smile broadened even more, if that was physically possible.
> "I'm Randall Flagg. And I'm the reason you're all dead." he replied.<p>

What happened next took no longer than twelve seconds. First, the majority of the marines, and Alexia as well, noticed that they couldn't move. Two of them (the engineer and Ramirez) could. But not of their own free will. Their eyes were glowing red. They turned their weapons on their squad mates, firing and killing the stationary targets. When it was just Alexia, Ramirez, and the engineer, Alexia was forced to watch in horror as the engineer proceeded to kill Ramirez before placing the barrel of his own shotgun in his mouth and pulling the trigger, painting the tree behind him different shades of red and purple. Suddenly, Alexia felt life return to her limbs.
> "I want you to give a message to your bosses." said Flagg. "Tell them: Randall Flagg is coming, and soon, you are all going to either serve me or die. Now, enjoy the rest of your day." Flagg then turned around and began walking away whistling an odd tune. Alexia, rather than watching him stride into the preverbal sunset, raised her Battle Rifle, aimed at Flagg's back between the shoulders, and pulled the trigger. When the muzzle finished flashing, Alexia was shocked to see Flagg gone. He had simply vanished into thin air. As she turned back to camp at a full run, she didn't notice the crow perched in a nearby tree. The crow with red eyes.<p>

13. Updates and Decisions

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 13: Updates and Decisions

A few things had happened since Sam Harwood's failed attempt at the score. He was now a sergeant major, demoted due to a particularly angry general who didn't like the outcome of an operation that Harwood was in charge of. Now, Sergeant Harwood served as a senior N.C.O. of sorts to the Spartans. Currently, he was watching the video recording of SCPO Alexia's interrogation, the one she finished a few hours ago. When she had been picked up, the higher ups were a little unsure of her story. But after her helmet's mission log showed them the truth, they began to get worried. The autopsies and mission logs from the helmets of the dead marines also showed the extent of a problem this could be. Despite what science said, supernatural powers

were apparently true. And the only guy who could use it, had the intent of either ruling or destroying them. After hours of debate amongst the officials of the UN, it was decided that the public shouldn't know about this. Morale was low enough as it was, but if John Q. Public and his loving family learned that there was another enemy besides the Covenant, one who was more dangerous and likely to kill all of humanity, they might not want to consider anything other than surrender. If they figure there's no point, they'll stop paying taxes and bonds. This will cause funds for war materials to stop flowing. No more guns, bullets, armor, tanks, or ****anything****. And that could not happen. Little did they know, that this was exactly what was going to happen, and Flagg knew it. He knew for damn sure, that would happen. Because he'd ****make**** it happen.

14. Down in the Dungeons

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 14: Down in the Dungeons

SCPO Andrew Greer-032 opened his eyes and grunted in pain. His head hurt, and his armor was gone, leaving the black rubber under suit. Sitting up, Andrew saw he was in a cell of some sort.

> "Good to see you're up." said a voice behind him. Andrew looked in that direction to see a man in combat fatigues, a standard t-shirt, and combat boots. "PFC Luke Zellner." said the marine, referring to himself.
 "Senior Chief Greer-032." Andrew replied as he rubbed the back of his sore head. "Any idea where we are?"

> "Some rebel base somewhere in some system." replied Luke. "So, Chief, you plan on bustin' us out?"
 Andrew turned and studied the glass wall. It was thick. After testing it, he found it too thick.

> "I'd need my armor to break that." Andrew said as he sat down in the corner across from Luke.
 "I thought Spartans could do anything." Luke said, already fearing where this conversation was going.

> "When properly equipped, yes." replied Andrew. The two sat in silence for some untold amount of time. Just as Luke was about to ask a question, a door opened at the end of the hall outside the cell. There was an odd clonking sound as a shadow in the light from the door began approaching their cell.
 "Somebody's gonna hurt someone," a voice was singing. "'Fore the night is through ough ough." The shadow soon stopped outside there cell, now fully visible to both inhabitants: Randall Flagg.

> "Well, well, well, if it isn't John Rambo himself." Flagg said, his

attention on the Spartan. Andrew had no idea who John Rambo was, and he honestly didn't care. "Ohhh, why so quiet?" asked Flagg in a mocking concerned mother voice. "Not so high and mighty without your armor, are ya tin man? And even if ya did have it, it wouldn't be of any use. No matter what happens here, the both of ya are gonna die."
 "Yeah? Well you obviously haven't heard: Spartans never die!" replied Luke, the confidence in his voice almost heart-breaking considering the truth.

> "Oh really? We'll just see about that." replied Flagg as two large guards entered, carrying a figure by the armpits. Even without the armor, it was obvious this figure was a Spartan. "This little guy here's been drugged so he'd co-operate." said Flagg. "And do you know what?" he asked. Before anything else could be said, one of the guards dug a pistol barrel into the back of the Spartan's skull and pulled the trigger, splattering bone shards and brain matter all over the glass wall of the cell. "It doesn't matter. Because he was dead anyway. Just. Like. You." Flagg said, his mouth spread in that maddening grin. Without even bothering to clean the glass, Flagg and the guards left the room, the living Spartan, and the horrified marine alone. I __**love**__ watching them squirm.__ Flagg thought, still grinning ear to ear.

15. New Preparations

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 15: New Preparations

"So, now do you understand?" asked Flagg. Locklear stood before him thinking it through.

> "Yes sir." he said at last.
 "Good. Just to be sure, why don't you repeat it to me?"

> "Each of our prisoners represents a person in the UNSC. We have a medic, an infantryman, an ODST, a woman, and a Spartan. By executing these prisoners live on galactic television, we show the UNSC that no member of their organization is safe. The citizens realize that their government and their military aren't as invincible as they thought. They begin to lose hope and wonder 'what's the point?'. They stop paying for military supplies, then when the UNSCDF is at their weakest, we strike with our grand army."
 "Excellent. Now, how ****is**** our grand army?" Flagg asked, his maddening smile showing his confidence.

> "As tip-top and ship-shape as can be." replied Locklear. "There's one thing sir: we're leaving someone out."
 "How so?" asked Flagg.

> "You said our prisoners represent every member of the UNSC. Well, we're missing one representative." with that, Locklear tossed a newspaper on the desk. It slid to a stop before Flagg read the headline of the upcoming press conference. "A high ranking, senior officer."
 Flagg looked at the article before turning to Locklear. "I like where your head is Johnny-boy. Yet another chance to disprove their invincibility."
> "How so?" asked Locklear.
 "There's no better way than to take one of their most heavily guarded prizes by walking right through the front door, and taking it by force." With that Randall Flagg made the plan which could, and **would** begin the cracks that would lead to the breaking of the UNSC's will to fight.

16. Walkins

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>The Gathering and the Storm<p><p>

Part 16: Walk-ins

"Dear God, make it stop..." grumbled Admiral Oliver Wilkinson after chewing three more pills of aspirin. _I fucking __**hate**__ migraines._ he thought angrily and miserably. He was backstage in a press conference area where he would announce good news in the war effort to the public: they'd only lost 3,000 people this month, which was rather small compared to previous months. _I see the glass as half full._ though Oliver in the most humorless tone of thought in the history of mankind.

"Hi Ma, it's me Georgie!" George Tomlinson said into the credit card payphone. "Yeah, I just got here, they're gonna start in a few minutes. I can't believe it either, my first job is covering a press conference by a senior ranking military officer, the most respected since Keyes!" _This is great._ thought Tomlinson. _It really is. After all the bad times and shit we've gone through over the years, everything's gonna be okay for once._ This reporting job would earn Tomlinson enough money to finally pay off the debt his mother had been living with since her father and her husband died when George was seven weeks old. She had put up with so much over the years, just so he could be happy and successful. She was the best mother in the world, and he loved her for it.

"Just be careful Honey, I hear those things get a little bit too exciting." Margerate Tomlinson said into the phone, her TV already on

the appropriate news channel to maybe see her little boy be on TV. She had seen and loved him through a lot over the years. There had been collectors and hasslers and people out solely for whatever penny she had because of her father and husband's bad habits. But that didn't matter. What mattered was that everything was gonna be okay.

> "Ma, stop trying to make it sound like a flip concert, it doesn't help." George replied jokingly.
 "It's worth a try ain't it?" she replied to his laughter. "Just do what you do best Honey: listen and be good. I love you Sweetie."

> "I love you too Ma. I gotta go, they're fixin' to start and I gotta get my spot. Bye!" he hung up before she could reply. That was the last time the two spoke together.<p>

"Ladies and gentlemen, can I have your attention please?" asked Oliver as he struggled to keep a straight face under the constant pain and pressure. "It's time to begin. As you know, the war against the Covenant has been fought for twenty-seven years with several million casualties. While it may seem bleak and hopeless, keep faith, because good ol' human resilience, and-" he was cut off by a loud crack and the splat of a headless corpse hitting the ground. Just as a woman screamed in horror, men with assault rifles high in the balconies began firing onto the guards and reporters. The main doors in the back then burst open, as if pushed by a hurricane gust, and a figure strode in. He wore an odd blue clothing with even more odd buttons on the breasts of his jacket. He began walking down the center row towards the stage, his worn in boots quiet on the expensive carpeting. As he entered, rebels poured into the large room led by the infamous John Locklear. They began rounding up and shooting reporters and guards alike, while several of the rebels viewed the carnage with the main cameras in the back. _The bastards are broadcasting this!_ Oliver though in horror. A marine with a shotgun stepped before the approaching figure, aimed his shotgun at his head, and pulled the trigger. In an impossible work of physics, the stock fired instead of the barrel, and the marine's arm flew from his torso in a spray of vital blood. The figure snapped his fingers, and the marine's head...imploded, for lack of a better term. Oliver watched in ever growing horror as the figure then stood before him, only the podium separating them.

> "Who are you?" Oliver asked in fear, already knowing the answer.
 "I'm Randall Flagg. And I just became your biggest problem." Flagg replied before tossing the podium to the side with one hand and using the other to grab the collar of the admiral. He then turned and began dragging Oliver (literally kicking and screaming) back up the center aisle.

Margerate continued to sob in horror at the sight on the television screen. All of the reporters and attendees were dead. One corpse no longer had a skull above his nostrils. It was Georgie. Sweet, sweet, innocent, never hurt anybody Georgie. She knew it. All mothers knew their children, even without vital details. The mother of one of the Iwo Jima flag raisers recognized her son from the picture when only his rear end was visible. Margerate was stricken with grief beyond comprehension. Some said it was this very same grief that resulted in her being found dead in her bed several hours later. The doctors said it was the large amount of sleeping pills in her system.

Flagg reached the docking bay with the now unconscious admiral. He soon was face to face with Locklear.

> "Casualties?" Flagg asked.
 "None for us, a lot for them."

> "Good. Load the men up. We're going home with our prize." Flagg replied as he one handedly tossed Oliver into one of the awaiting Pelicans before boarding it himself. Within two hours, they were home, safe and sound. Oliver was locked up. Flagg had won.<p>

17. Task Force Kilo Fower

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 17: Task Force Kilo Fower

In a small briefing room in a military base somewhere in the universe, six soldiers sat and waited. Four of these soldiers were Spartan-II's. One was a Spartan-III. The last...well, there was just no simple way to describe Artemis Entreri. Soon, a figure walked in the room, his uniform bearing the insignia of three silver stars and the UNSC Navy. Sergeant Major Sam Harwood-191 suddenly stood at attention.

> "Admiral on the deck!" he cried. The other Spartans, including the young S-III, quickly snapped to attention while Artemis simply stood before assuming the attention stance.
 "At ease." said Vice Admiral Pierce. As the six sat down, Admiral Pierce took position before a holopad projector, which began showing the footage of what was now being called the "CNN Slaughter" in which thirty civilian reporters and attendees had lost their lives, as well a squad of nine marines.

> "This is Randall Flagg. Formerly designated 'Target Romeo Foxtrot'." Admiral Pierce said as the holopad froze on the image of Flagg. "He is the leader assembling a grand army of rebels with the full intent and purpose to destroy the UNSC, first morally, then physically. That is unless we bend to his will and accept him as grand dictator of the universe. Since we have no intention of doing any such thing, he intends to make us by means of morale sabotage. He intends to soften us up and accept our surrender to his 'might and will'. If not, the he intends to kill us all. As for his softening up, we intend to prevent that. His morale sabotage will come in the form of executing several UNSC prisoners including Admiral Oliver Wilkinson, and Senior Chief Petty Officer Andrew Greer-032. This execution will occur on live, intergalactic television, and thus severely cripple John Q. Public's morale, even more so than it already is. This information was all we could get from our double agent before we lost contact with him. As I said before, we intend to stop this morale sabotage, and you're going to be the ones to do it. You six are here by designated 'Task Force Kilo Fower', or 'Task Force K4'. Your mission is split up into four objectives. Objective

1: Infiltrate the rebel base Orion 7. Objective 2: Find and kill Randall Flagg. We're not taking any more chances with him. Objective 3: Find and rescue the hostages. Our agent said there were in between three and six of them, including Admiral Wilkinson. And Objective 4: Destroy the base by means of HAVOK tactical nukes. How you go about this mission is up to your team commander. Seeing as there are three of you here of equal rank or authority, you'll draw straws to determine the commander." As he said this last part, Admiral Pierce took three straws, rubbed them in his hands, and held them to the three contenders: Sam, Artemis, and MCPO Xerxes Vatton-047. Drawing, they found Xerxes and Artemis with the short straws.
 "Right. So Sergeant Major Harwood will serve as team leader. I'll let you work out your plan, then you'll be ready to leave. Good luck." saying this, Pierce gave a salute which was returned by all six solders before he left the room, leaving Task Force K4 to discuss its plans.

18. The Gathering

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 18: The Gathering

Sergeant Major Sam Harwood-191 strode aboard the Pelican, checking its contents yet again. Everything had to be perfect. If not, they were fucked. As the other four passengers took their seats, Sam activated a comm channel. "Joal, this is Sam, can you hear me, over?"

In a Longsword fighter somewhere else on the _UNSC Santiago_, Chief Petty Officer Joal-153 keyed a response. "I read you loud and clear, sir. Are you sure you can't get someone else to fly this thing? I'd rather be on the ground for this, over."

> "Sorry Joal. You're the only one who can do it." replied Sam.
 "And why's that?" asked Joal, fully aware that all the Spartans were trained to fly a Longsword, and he wasn't the only one with an A.I.

"Because you're dependable." Sam simply said before cutting the line. He then took his seat and properly secured his safety belt as the Pelican's hatch closed and the _Santiago_'s launch bay cleared of personnel in preparation for the launches. Within ten minutes, the Pelican was flying through space and preparing to enter the atmosphere of Orion 7 roughly five miles away from the target area, the area where the spy said the rebel base was...before they lost

contact with him.

Locklear stood, waiting in the hall outside the door to the soundproofed room that was still emitting screams of unbearable pain and agony. He'd been standing there for twenty-three minutes, and was about to get a beverage when the screaming stopped. After roughly two more minutes, the door opened. Locklear was able to catch a glimpse of the wall that was ****supposed**** to be grey. Now, it was an unmistakable red. Exiting the room was Randall Flagg, his hands and face from the nostrils down covered in blood that was still wet. He stopped before Locklear as the highly underpaid clean-up team entered the interrogation room. "There was no other spy, he wasn't lying about that." Flagg said.

> "He held out for that long?" Locklear asked amazed.

> "No, he fessed up ages ago. I just wanted to enjoy it." Flagg said with the most humorless grin Locklear had ever seen. The grin was made even more unsettling by the blood and tiny pieces of flesh that literally coated his teeth and gums. Clearing his head Locklear pressed on.
 "I assume he told when they were coming?" he asked.

> "And you assume right, Johnny-boy. But remember: when you assume, you make an ass out of u and me." Flagg said with an odd chuckle, as if he was finding something else funny. "Have the men prepare, I want to have the prisoners executed before the new party-goers arrive. Then we can have some fun with them."<p>

Pvt. Melanie Howards reared back her head and let out her victorious cry of orgasm. She was topless and straddling the pelvis of LCpl. Donovan Siefker, the medic with which she had been imprisoned since his arrival here. Don was also gasping, his hands firmly cupped around the perfect breasts of the ODSST "platoon slut" who was proud of her status. This had been their fifth time in the past forty minutes. The reason they had abandoned their survival training and given in to the most basic instinct in the human body, was the overheard conversation of two guards. From said conversation, they had pretty much figured out that they were gonna die. Their initial goal had been to lure one of the guards in with the temptation of letting him have a turn, then attacking him, taking his weapon and making a run for it. When neither guard came forward, they just decided to fuck it...or rather, each other...again...and again.

In another cell, Pfc. Luke Zellner and SCPO Andrew Greer-032 were sitting on the floor, having their usual POW conversations of their lives, their adventures, and their predicament. They had also formed an escape plan, but none of the essential materials had been delivered to the cell, although they had been on usual bases, and then removed. Apparently, Flagg knew of their plan and was starving them of the necessities for escape. They had been discussing that if they ever got out, what Zellner was going to say about the Spartan execution: absolutely nothing. After Flagg's acknowledgement of their plan, they stopped for that information was classified...then started again when they realized it wouldn't matter a flying fuck.

In his own solitary cell, Admiral Oliver Wilkinson writhed on the ground in pain. His head was pounding from the migraines he was getting. There were often times when he'd pass out, then regain consciousness...at least for a few minutes until the next fit unconsciousness...like the one...coming on...now...

At 2:37 P.M. (1437 hours military time), a Longsword fighter was flying overhead, attracting the attention of the rebel forces. On Flagg's personal orders, rebel forces were stationed on high alert, and prepared for an attack which was coming sooner than Flagg had been told. Thought no one realized it, the gathering was complete. Now would come the storm.

19. The Storm

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 19: The Storm

"What the hell's going on?" Flagg asked, annoyance creeping into his voice.

> "Longsword." Locklear said simply, his gaze following the speedy fighter as it soared through the air. "Looks like that rescue force was to arrive sooner than we were told."
 But that can't be. Flagg thought. _If that prick had been lying, I would've known about it._ But then he remembered the visions. How his all-knowing had been diminished. His powers were...weakening. Receding. However you wanted to say it, Flagg was losing it. Just like he did before Vegas...

> "Locklear, I want that thing destroyed, and I want you to take care of it. Personally." Flagg said.

> "Yes sir." Locklear said, taking notice of the threat and anger in Flagg's voice. "Ryan, load up my fighter. We're going for a spin." he said as he turned to a nearby rebel. With that, and the usual "Yes sir" from the grunt, the two rebels headed toward the fighter hangar where several Longswords and Pelicans were kept. Flagg gazed at the soaring Longsword for a moment before turning back into the tunnel which lead into one of the many entrances to the base. Pulling out a comm, he activated it and spoke. "Prep the prisoners and the cameras. We're going live in five." he said.<p>

Sergeant Major Sam Harwood-191 leapt from the Pelican's troop bay, followed by the other members of Task Force K4. As per the plan, they split up to perform their respective jobs. Sam's was distraction, and there's no better way to distract somebody than bursting in the front door while unloading a machine gun. That was Sam's philosophy, anyways. As the infrared satellite imagery showed, there was a tunnel entrance right at the DZ. Moving forward, Sam set a satchel charge at the door and stood back. When it blew, he stormed in, followed by Artemis Entreri, Master Chief Petty Officer Xerxes Vatton-047, and Senior Chief Petty Officer Alexia-234. Sure enough, they were greeted by guards, who were promptly mowed down by Sam's M247 GPMG, Xerxes's

MA5C Assault Rifle, and Alexia's BR55 Battle Rifle. Sam flashed the appropriate hand signals. Xerxes's acknowledgement light winked blue, and the Spartan peeled off down a separate corridor while Sam, Alexia, and Artemis, his two energy swords thirsty for blood, continued down the center corridor.

In a ventilation shaft somewhere in the underground base, Petty Officer Third Class Raynor G-070 dropped to a prone position and began crawling, her silenced MA5K Assault Carbine cradled in the crooks of her elbows. Passing air vents, she was looking for a specific room. She continued crawling, and crawling. She had to hurry, time was of the essence.

Andrew was just about to sleep for what he was sure would be the last time when he heard the sound of a silenced three-round burst and a body hitting the floor. The sound was then followed by a whistle from the right of his cell. It was a light, seven note tune, which he returned: Oly Oly Oxen Free. The unmistakable figure of a Spartan-III then stood before the cell, causing Luke to jump in surprise. "Senior Chief-032?" the S-III asked.
> "Yes." he said.
> "I'm PO3 G-070. You're getting out of here." she replied as she produced a key card before swiping it through a slot next to the cell's door. With a hiss, the door opened, and Andrew and Luke were free...somewhat.

Melanie and Don were quiet as statues as the guards led them through the halls, their wrists bound by outdated flexi-cuffs. They were obsolete, but effective. "Once we get the other prisoners, we're to report to the main theatre hall for the big show." said one guard.

> "Yeah. Who all's left, anyway?" asked Guard No. 2.
> "The first prisoner, the Spartan, and the admiral. Then we're headin' for-" he was cut off as his head was torn apart by three silent rounds. The other guard jumped as this happened, but before he could do anything, his head too was promptly hit. The two prisoners were then relieved to see three armed figures round the corner. One was a dwarf in weird armor, another looked like an android who looked barely human, and the third was a marine in combat fatigues. "I'm PO3 G-070, and I'm here to rescue you." the voice of a young girl said from the dwarf's helmet. After Andrew and Luke loosened the cuffs, Don and Melanie picked up the guards' weapons.
> "Now we just gotta find the admiral they were talking about." Don said.
> "What? Fuck the admiral, let's get the hell out of here!" Melanie said.
> "No one gets left behind." Andrew said simply. This ended the discussion. As they stood and prepared to move out, an unmistakable alert siren blared throughout the complex.

Joal banked right ****hard**** and dodged the incoming AA fire. He had already taken out seven enemy fighters, and was begging for more.
> "You know, this kind of attitude is going to get you killed someday." said the Greek soldier resembling A.I. known as Skeith.
> "Yeah? You're the one who left the relative safety of a defense platform for dangerous suicide missions with a friggin' Spartan." Joal said as he dodged another missile.
> "Well that was boring." said Skeith.
> "Exactly!" Joal cried as he downed another fighter. "And what kind of attitude do you mean, anyway?"
> "Reckless 'I don't give a damn' attitude. You're not an action star."
> "No, I'm a Spartan, and that's ten-thousand times better!"

Joal replied as another fighter bit the dust.

Locklear sat in the pilot's seat of his personal Longsword. He was in the process of engaging the bogie. With a press of the button, he fired three missiles

that Joal barely avoided. "Whoa!" he cried as they soared past his fighter. "Didn't see that coming." he said more seriously.
> "Exactly!" replied Skeith. Ignoring him, Joal U-turned and headed straight toward<p>

Locklear rolled and fired his machine guns. Even though he was barrel rolling, he could clearly see the bogie dodging his shots. Performing acrobatic feats the likes of which the Blue Angels would be proud, Locklear and Joal fought in the most exhilarating dogfight either one had ever been in. Banking, Locklear found himself in the perfect firing position. As he fired his missiles, he couldn't help but say "So long you

Son of a bitch!" Joal cried as he dodged several missiles with what onlookers would call dumb luck, but Joal would call "honed skill". Banking, Joal was struggling to find a good shot, his heart pounding, his adrenaline pumping. This was truly the showdown of a lifetime.

Xerxes dropped another three guards before reloading his Assault Rifle. When he was sure the area was clear, he dropped to one knee at the exact spot. Reaching into the satchel around his shoulders, he produced three HAVOK tactical nukes. Placing them, he camouflaged them with surrounding boxes and junk. The nukes were set. Objective 3 was now possible.

Sam, Artemis, and Alexia rounded the corner toward the rendezvous area. They were only a few halls away when they found their path blocked by the Dark Man.

20. The End of it All

****Author's Note:****_Well, I have some explaining to do for this story. I'm part of a text based role-play site called Advanced Halo Unlimited. On our site is a section for fanfiction. I've been a fan of fanfiction (ha) for years, so I decided to try my hand at it. It's a crossover of sorts, containing the supervillain of my favorite author, and the original characters created by myself and other members of AHU. And so, after some revisions, updates, and spelling corrections, here is the fruit of my labor. I hope you enjoy it._

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>The Gathering and the Storm
 Part 20: The End of it All

"Well, well, well, look what the pussy dragged in." said Randall Flagg, that maddening grin on his face. Sam's eyes never left the enemy as his internal comm activated.

> "Alexia, get to the rendezvous point, and get the others to the extraction point. Now." Alexia's blue acknowledgment light winked, and she moved down a hallway on the right, seemingly ignored by Flagg.
 "So you're the guy the UNSC's been making such a fuss about?" Artemis asked tauntingly. "I'm disappointed, I was expecting something more threatening." Flagg's grin faltered for the briefest second. It was in that second that Sam, for the first time, seriously wondered if they would make it out alive.

Joal's heart raced as he dodged missile after missile, bullet after bullet.

Locklear couldn't stand the suspense as he pursued his target with unrelenting viciousness.

Dodging another set of ordnance, Joal pulled hard in a somersault.

Locklear watched as the tango bird pulled up, too fast for him to follow.

He was now behind the bad guy, and Joal knew this would finish it.

Locklear didn't need to be a rocket scientist to know that he was screwed.

Joal fired his rockets, and was rewarded with the beautiful sight of the bogey's right wing vanishing in a ball of flame.

Locklear fought for control of the bird, and stirred it to his right, away from the base. He'd have to make a crash-landing, and he'd have to ride this bird every step of the way down.

Andrew's Assault Rifle ended another guard's career/life with a burst of ammunition. More and more tangos were flooding the halls, all summoned by the alarms. Don, Luke, Melanie, and Raynor were also taking down guards with their weapons (AR's, SMG's, and the MA5K), but more just kept coming. Fortunately, Spartans always saw the enemy as a sort of mobile weapons cache.

Oliver slowly regained consciousness on the floor. Outside, an alarm was blaring through the complex. He hoped that a rescue effort had been launched. _Please, let there be one. I swear I'll stop drinking, I'll go to church every Sunday, I'll never curse again, I'll retire_—before he could finish the thought, the door to his cell opened, and he saw a Spartan. Even without the armor, it was hard to mistake those fuckers.

Andrew saw the admiral on the ground, and originally thought that he'd been tortured. Lifting Oliver onto his shoulders, Andrew turned to Raynor. "Lead the way, let's get out of here." So she did. The "rescue force" moved down the halls towards the rendezvous point, taking out any enemies dumb enough to get in their way. They soon came to a corner, and knew they were screwed. A group of guards (heavily armed with shotguns) was manning a blockade of the last hallway they needed to travel down.

> "How the hell do we get past them?" Luke asked. The only way to defeat them would be with grenades, which they severely lacked. Don thought of it for a moment before taking action.
 "HEY,

ASS-FUCKS!" he screamed at the guards as he tore into the open, spraying his SMG at them. "COME AND GET ME!!!" he cried before he charged down an opposite hallway, heading away from the escapees. The guards tore after him, and Donovan Siefker was never seen again.

Alexis reached the rendezvous point, an intersection of hallways that was currently empty. This worried her, until a group of ragtag non-guards arrived. "Good to see you Andrew." she said to the non-armored Spartan.

> "Likewise. You our evac?" he asked.
 "Nope, that's this way." she said before leading the escapees (one missing, she saw) until they stepped through a doorway into sunlight they hadn't felt in days. Luke practically burst into tears of joy when he saw the waiting Pelican dropship. Boarding it, they all took seats.
> "Alright, let's get the hell outta here." Melanie said.
 "No, not yet." Alexia said. "We're still waiting for Xerxes, Sam, and Artemis." she said, her gaze fixed on the tunnel doorway.

Artemis lunged forward and swung his swords, both of which were grabbed by Flagg. He then did the impossible by breaking them in half. Darting his hand forward, Artemis's throat was clasped in an iron death-grip before he was thrown clean through three concrete walls. Sam raised his machine gun and fired, only to discover his weapon was empty...which it hadn't even been close to being two minutes earlier. Flagg spin-kicked Sam's MG in half before slamming his fist into Sam's side, shattering multiple ribs. Sam retaliated with a swift kick to Flagg's chest, sending him flying. Rebounding off the wall, Flagg slammed his fists repeatedly into various areas of Sam's anatomy. Grabbing one of Flagg's fists, Sam swung the other combatant into the wall, creating webs of cracks and crevices. Flagg simply thrust his foot straight into Sam's chest, sending him flying through the tunnel of holes created by Artemis mere moments earlier. Strolling through these holes, hardly a scratch on him, Flagg grinned at the sight he saw. Crumpled against a heavily damaged wall, was Artemis Entreri. Not far away, was a nearly unconscious Sam Harwood. Flagg almost burst out laughing when he saw Artemis wearily draw his side arm, an M6D Pistol, and cock it. As Artemis's shaking hand slowly extended to aim the pistol, it was seemingly snatched from him by air. Flying through empty space, the pistol landed in Flagg's outstretched hand. There was the unmistakable crack as the pistol fired, sending a round clean into the center of the forehead of Artemis Entreri. Sam slowly raised his head in horror as he watched Flagg stroll towards him, casually tossing the pistol aside. The bastard was whistling. Standing before Sam, Flagg was grinning insanely.

> "Well, Rocky, seems we just came to the end of the show. It was fun while it lasted, but now it's time for me to crush your fucking skull like a-" he was cut off by a burst of Assault Rifle fire. Screaming in pain, Flagg tried to grab the three bullet holes in his back as he fell to his knees, then his face. Sam could only stare in disbelief as Xerxes reloaded and approached him.
 "Don't know about you Sam, but I think it's time to get outta here." he said before helping Sam to his feet. The two then began the long trek towards the evac point, leaving Flagg to his misery.

"Can we go yet?" Melanie asked impatiently, obviously more concerned with her own well being more than those of her saviors.

> "Not until-" started Alexia, but she was cut off by the two Spartans that came hobbling through the doorway. As she helped them

into the Pelican, she asked Xerxes "Where's Artemis?"
 "He's dead." Xerxes replied simply. Alexia nodded in understanding. Knowing they had the full head-count, she ordered the pilot to get them out. As the hatch closed and they left the area, Xerxes held a remote. With a flex of his thumb, he pressed the button.

Flagg couldn't believe his luck. What the hell had happened?! Things were going so perfectly!!! Why the fuck did this have to-> His anger was cut short by horror as in his mind, he saw a set of small devices.
 "NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!" he screamed in rage before there was that extremely brief flash of light. And Flagg was gone.

At the crash site, John Locklear climbed out of the wreckage. Looking towards the sky, he saw the Longsword and a Pelican flying towards the atmosphere, in a southerly direction. Then, there was a gust of light and air, and he was forced against the wreckage by the nuclear explosion where the base had been. When he was able to stand, Locklear could only stare at the mushroom cloud forming to the south. Using his emergency radio, Locklear called the emergency pick-up crew on the other side of the forest. They would pick him up, and they would move shop to the Praebo colony. Dammit.

The UNSC had won after all.

21. Epilogue

****Author's Note:****_Well, I have some explaining to do for this story. I'm part of a text based role-play site called Advanced Halo Unlimited. On our site is a section for fanfiction. I've been a fan of fanfiction (ha) for years, so I decided to try my hand at it It's a crossover of sorts, containing the supervillain of my favorite author, and the original characters created by myself and other members of AHU. And so, after some revisions, updates, and spelling corrections, here is the fruit of my labor. I hope you enjoy it._

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* * *

>The Gathering and the Storm
 Epilogue

Admiral Oliver Wilkinson simply started at the plaques remembering Lance Corporal Donovan Siefker and Artemis Entreri, the two posthumous Medal of Honor recipients. Siefker had also received the Prisoner of War Medallion. Soon, he was approached by reporters asking questions of his imprisonment. No, he was not tortured. No, they had no intentions of using him for negotiation purposes. And yes, he owed everything to his rescuers.

Petty Officer Third Class Raynor G-070 simply smiled for the cameras as instructed while her picture was taken with that of Private Melanie Howard and Private First Class Luke Zellner. On the outside, she was all smiles. On the inside, she was hurting deeply. Her boss, and only true friend, had died. Killed by a monster the likes of which had never been seen before. But that didn't matter. That freak

was dead too. They'd made sure of it.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Andrew Greer-032 stepped into the hall, fully suited in his new armor, and outfitted with the new weaponry: a BR55HB SR Battle Rifle and an M6G Magnum. Soon, his stroll was joined by SCPO Alexia-234. "New assignment, huh?" she asked.

> "Yeah. new ship. They want a Spartan on-board for motivation purposes." Andrew replied.
 "Good luck with that." she said, extending a hand that Andrew took and shook. And so the two friends went their separate ways.

Sam loaded another speed-loader into his revolver, glad that his injuries were gone. He was soon rewarded with another five bulls-eyes, once again bringing his score up to 190. He looked to his right. No Xerxes. He looked to his left. No Xerxes. Loading his last round, he aimed carefully, waiting for the bang and the new high score. Just as he fired, the target dropped to the floor, his round hitting the wall behind it. He could only stare at the spot before turning behind him. Sitting on the target controls was Xerxes, who stood up and looked at the aforementioned computer innocently. "Oops! Sat on the release button! I am ****so**** sorry about that! Well, better luck next time Sam!" Xerxes said as he began walking away, not noticing Sam loading a round into his revolver. There was a loud crack. "SONUVABITCH!!!" Xerxes cried in pain as he grabbed the spot where the rubber bullet had hit his ass. As he swore in pain, Sam left the room bellowing in laughter, reveling in his victory.

But little did any of them know, they were not truly victorious. Elsewhere in the universe, sitting on a tree branch, was a crow. A crow with red eyes and three minuscule bullet holes in its back. And so the Dark Man was watching.

> And waiting.<p>

THE END

* * *

>Author's Note: _Well, here ya go. Thanks for reading my first fanfic. I'll gladly accept criticisms, be they positive or negative. And don't worry, my next fic will have longer chapters. It's been fun, and I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I have writing it, if not more (damn procrastination...). Here's to my future here!_

End
file.